



Rising Star – Brian Zimmerman

Job Corps Graduate and USDA, Forest Service Employee



I Grew Up Under the Threat of Wildfires

Brian is a proud, GS-4 Fire Technician/Engine Operator on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Great Divide Ranger District where he’s worked as a permanent, full time employee since 2009. Zimmerman is no stranger to wildland fires. Growing up in the small mountain town of Bailey, Colorado, he and his family were evacuated three times in one summer from the threat of nearby wildland fires. When he’s not working on fires, Brian works with the wildlife and silviculture staff conducting surveys.

Job Corps Launched my Firefighting Career

The job opportunities were limited for Brian in Bailey, Colorado. After graduating from high school Brian went to work for the local deli and grocery store where he stayed until he was 22 year old. The desire to be a firefighter had stayed with him – he just didn’t know how he was going to make that happen. One day while talking with a friend, he learned that the Trapper Creek Job Corps in Montana had a great fire training program. In 2007, Brian made the trek to Montana where he got his first healthy dose of fire training.

“It was exciting to be in the action,” says Brian. “That summer my crew members and I saved two bridges and kept the road open by cutting and removing trees from across the road.”

“Growing up, I saw wildland firefighters keep our little town of Bailey safe. At the age of 12, I knew I was made to fight fires. It was already in my blood. I’m a huge fan of Smokey Bear – in fact I have a Smokey tattoo on my right leg!”

In April of 2007 he graduated from Trapper Creek Job Corps and transferred to the Schenck Job Corps and completed the Advanced Wildland Fire Program as a member of the Davidson River Initial Attack Crew. Brian says he learned more than just firefighting at Job Corps. He said he “learned to be a leader” and that he “gained the confidence to be a better person.”

Forest Service People Really Invested in Me

Brian says there were people who helped him all along the way. Les Meyers, his first Job Corps instructor, encouraged and guided him. Christopher Geidel, his current supervisor, is very supportive and is a true friend. Clara Johnson, Job Corps Liaison, gave him personal and professional tips and helped him get a detail in the Regional Office when he was laid off for the summer. He said that experience “broadened his perspective” of the Forest Service and taught him there’s much more to the agency than just “boots on the ground.”

I See a Crew/Engine Boss in My Future

As Brian makes plans for the next five years, he definitely sees himself in the fire business. His preference would be to work in Western Montana “where the big fires are” and where he can attain his qualifications as an IC-5 and eventually get promoted to Crew Boss. He’s open to working for the Bureau of Land Management and the USDI National Park Service, but his preference is to stay with the Forest Service.

When asked about advice he would give to other young people he says, “If you are looking for a better life, don’t get down on yourself for the mistakes you’ve made. Learn from those mistakes and keep moving forward.”

